



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A



Peter professes Jesus:
Detail from stained glass in the church of St Mary and St Lambert in Stonham Aspal in Suffolk.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2. Use the prayer provided below.

PRAYER FOR LABORERS FOR THE HARVEST

By Pope John Paul II

*Jesus, Good Shepherd,
raise up in all parish communities,
priest and deacons, religious,
consecrated lay people and missionaries
according to the needs of the whole world,
which You love and want to save.*

*We entrust to You in a particular way
our parish community;
create in it the spiritual atmosphere
of the first Christians
in order that it may be a cenacle of prayer
where we lovingly receive the Holy Spirit
and His gifts.*

*Assist our pastors and all consecrated souls.
Guide the steps
of those who have generously welcomed Your call
and prepared themselves for Holy Orders
or the Profession of the Evangelical Counsels.*

*Direct Your loving gaze
to the many well-disposed young people
and invite them to follow You.
Help them to understand
that only in You they can achieve their fulfillment.*

*We entrust these great desires of Your Heart
to the powerful intercession of Mary,
Mother and model of all vocations,
and beg You to sustain our faith
in the certainty that the Father will listen
to what You Yourself have instructed us to ask for.*

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ In today's Gospel Peter takes center stage. Peter confesses the Lordship of Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus confers special leadership responsibilities upon Peter.
- ▶ Jesus also announces his pending death.
- ▶ We are reminded in today's liturgy that God gives us the strength, wisdom and knowledge to confess Jesus as Lord.
- ▶ Once we confess Jesus as Lord we are compelled to become ministers of the Gospel in the world.
- ▶ Today we hear about the true meaning of authority and power. Both refer to the ability to carry out a task using all the inherent resources, attributes and skills a person brings to accomplish the task or intended end.
- ▶ Authority does not imply the use of force.
- ▶ Authority and power can be ordained and bestowed by God. (John 19:11).
- ▶ Authority can be misused even if God-given, however.
- ▶ Authority refers to the position one has by virtue of his or her office or position to command obedience and submission.
- ▶ God-given authority is always wielded with love, compassion, vision and the wisdom of God.
- ▶ God in Christ has bestowed such authority upon the Church to lead God's people until his return at the end of time.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, or word from the homily spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading: Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

- ▶ Sheba was King Hezekiah's primary master of the palace. Isaiah had nothing but disdain for him.
- ▶ Those who wished to see the king must first go through Sheba. He wore his authority like a badge as he carried the keys of the palace draped over his shoulder as an ostentatious sign that it was he who held the keys to the palace—he was officially in charge of the keys of the House of David.
- ▶ Isaiah hints at the reason Sheba was removed from office. He cared more for his own concerns than he did for the concerns of the people and the King.
- ▶ He took advantage of his authority and built a lavish tomb for himself on a hillside, an act reserved usually for the wealthy as a sign of their great wealth and aristocracy.
- ▶ There was probably more behind Isaiah's angst with Sheba. It is likely that he blamed Sheba for the King's foolhardy alliance with Egypt against Syria.
- ▶ Sheba was deposed and Eliakim was appointed in his place.
- ▶ Eliakim was commissioned and vested with authority through the donning of robe, sash and key.

- ▶ The image of a peg in a sure spot was presented as a sign of the durability of his investiture.
- ▶ The rest of the story is no better than the first, however. Eliakim would eventually abuse his power and authority too.
- ▶ The two officials are placed before us as a sign of misused and misplaced authority.
- ▶ Jesus was understood by the early Church to be the keeper of the keys of the House of David.
- ▶ He conferred that responsibility on Peter and the apostles.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about authority?
- ▶ Have you ever been in a position of authority? What can you say about the use of authority as a result of your experience?

Second Reading: Romans 11: 33-36

- ▶ Paul’s heart is heavy as he reminisces about God’s plan of salvation for the House of David.
- ▶ With deep regret and resignation he bemoans the reality that his beloved Jewish community failed to see what he and the other gentile converts so readily understood about Jesus the Christ.
- ▶ It was beyond credulity that the chosen people of God could not accept Christ for who he was—Lord, Savior and Messiah.
- ▶ His only option in the face of frustration and sorrow was to place the entire situation in God’s hand and trust God’s will in all things.
- ▶ He ends his reflection with a common theological assertion: no one can know the mind and heart of God. God will not be manipulated, confined or defined.
- ▶ Even the most astute, intelligent, educated theologian must confess to his or her own inadequacy when it comes to fully grasping the totality of God and his ways.
- ▶ The theologian must always understand his or her work to be anything but absolute. It is always open to God’s scrutiny, change and transformation. God’s ways simply cannot fully be penetrated.
- ▶ (At the end of St. Thomas Aquinas’ life, after writing one of the most brilliant theological treatises of all-time, the *Summa*, mused that it was but mere straw in the face of God’s omniscience.)
- ▶ God’s ways must continually be plumbed, the depths of which we will never fully comprehend.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a brief story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ What do we learn from Paul in today's reading?
- ▶ What does he teach us about our relationship with God?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced a situation in which you missed a truth you should have understood? What are the implications for our lives when that happens? What is the challenge?
- ▶ What does Paul's concern about his Jewish brothers and sisters teach us about God's inscrutable ways?

Gospel: Matthew 16: 13-20

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Matthew's primary theological focus takes center stage in today's Gospel—the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of Man, Lord and Savior, the promised Messiah of the Scriptures,
- ▶ Peter soars to the heights—he is the first disciple to profess Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Then in typical Peter fashion, he stumbles. He tells Jesus that he should not have to suffer.
- ▶ Jesus praised Peter for recognizing his identity. He tells him that he is a rock and that his Church would be built upon that rock.
- ▶ He then chastens Peter for suggesting that the Son of Man should avoid the necessary suffering that Jesus was prophesying was coming soon.
- ▶ Drawing on the earlier “rock” image, Jesus tells Peter not to be a stumbling “rock” for others.
- ▶ Jesus is teaching Peter a lesson. Leadership assumes a powerful responsibility. Ministry to God's people requires faith, trust and openness to God's work and God's grace.

- ▶ Peter can either be “the rock” or “the stumbling block.” If he wants to make the right choice he must follow Jesus’ example—the path of kenosis—offering one’s life for the sake of sinners.
- ▶ Ministers of the Gospel, effective leaders who possess power and authority, must expect to suffer. A person’s ministry will be as effective as their willingness to embrace the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- ▶ Jesus is our shepherd, our teacher and above all our perfect model.
- ▶ Jesus exalts Peter’s confession of him as inspired by God.
- ▶ Peter, unlike the Pharisees who asked for signs, asks Jesus for nothing yet God gives him the greatest gift of all.
- ▶ God reveals the identity of his Son—Jesus, the Christ, the Lord, the Son of Man, and Savior of the universe.
- ▶ Jesus promises that God will stand with the Church whose leadership Peter assumes and whose authority will remain until the end of time.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Baptism calls every believer into God’s service. Thus we all must be prepared to suffer. What does Peter teach us about suffering? What does Jesus teach us about suffering for the sake of the kingdom?
- ▶ How have you suffered because of your faith?
- ▶ Are you willing to suffer for your faith?
- ▶ Are you willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom? If not, what steps might you take to become willing?
- ▶ What does effective Christian leadership require?

Further reflections:

- ▶ Peter’s confession of faith is a confession each believer must make. There is power in Jesus’ name and when believers call upon that name the powers of hell will not prevail against them.
- ▶ God remains faithful to his people. That faithfulness is recognized in the authority passed on to the Church.
- ▶ God’s people can stand firm and be confident in the authority God has given to the Church. They can be assured that the power of evil will not tear down what God has built upon a solid foundation.
- ▶ Peter’s authority is God-given and will be passed on to those who will follow in his footsteps for future generations to come. His authority is absolute. Nothing will prevail against it.

- ▶ Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom and the power to bind a loose the sins of the people.
- ▶ Peter was the first disciple to be called by Christ; he is also the first credible witness to the resurrection.
- ▶ Jesus demanded that Peter would nourish his sheep and lead his people in paths of righteousness.
- ▶ The very human, impetuous, passionate, weak and oft confused Peter, was made the leader of Christ's Church.
- ▶ Peter was given the authority to exercise leadership over the Church—to create rules of governance and to allow exceptions to those rules.
- ▶ He was empowered to exercise due diligence in his decisions and pattern them after the example of Christ and the Gospel—an awesome responsibility.
- ▶ Jesus passed on the authority to every believer to serve God's people. Such authority is based on the Paschal Mystery—Jesus example of death and resurrection.
- ▶ Since we are all members of God's priestly people we too, like Peter, have been given the authority to minister in God's name.
- ▶ Baptism anoints every member of the household of faith a priest, prophet and king—priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim God's word through word and deed and king to lead people to Christ.
- ▶ The ministry of priest, prophet and king assumes care for the poor, marginalized and oppressed. The biblical imperative to love one another demands that we work for justice in the world. We can do no less for so great a gift given to God's people.
- ▶ When people fail to exercise love when wielding power and authority it is not true authority in the biblical sense. It is abusive power and never what Christ intended for his Church.
- ▶ Above all, the proper use of authority is a call to love one another unto death.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example.

- ▶ In what way do you relate to Peter? What does Peter teach us today about our relationship with Jesus and with the Church?
- ▶ How do you feel when the Catholic Church states that Peter's role of absolute leadership continues in the role of the Pope today? According to what we learn in today's Gospel, why does that assertion make sense?

- ▶ Why is that important for Catholics?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about God's relationship with the Church?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the authority of the Church?
- ▶ In light of what we heard in this Gospel and its explanation, what is true leadership?
- ▶ What leadership qualities do you possess?
- ▶ What leadership qualities are needed in the Church?
- ▶ What did you hear that challenges you to be a better disciple in your life at this time?
- ▶ What does this Gospel demand that you do if you are to be a true disciple of the Lord?

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session

OR

PRAYER FOR HOLY PRIESTS by St. Charles Borromeo

O Holy Mother of God,

pray for the priests

your Son has chosen to serve the church.

Help them by your intercession,

to be holy,

zealous and chaste.

Make them models of virtue

in the service of God's people.

Help them to be prayerful in meditations,

effective in preaching,

and enthusiastic in the daily offering of

the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Help them to administer the sacraments with joy.

APPENDIX

- In what way do you relate to Peter? What does Peter teach us today about our relationship with Jesus and with the Church?

Peter teaches us to be strong in our faith, to be willing to jump out of the boat to follow the Master and to love the Lord with our heart and soul. I love the way Peter always puts his foot in his mouth. He is impetuous and oft times impulsive. He is an icon for all of us today as we walk the journey of faith. I figure if Peter can lose heart at times there is hope for me.

Peter is the first to confess Jesus as Lord. He teaches us what true leadership entails. He was willing to die for his faith—only after many starts and stumbles.

I am blessed to know a true disciple of the Lord who, like Peter, exercises God-given authority with the love and wisdom God intends. He is a true pastor of the people. Every person is loved and respected regardless of the baggage and agenda they bring. He does not give into every person's whim, but every person does receive a fair hearing. Every person who approaches this worthy pastor of my parish is treated with respect and dignity—regardless of the issue.

He is at the bedside of the dying and he holds the hand of the grieving. He ministers to the people of the parish and he understands his role to the wider church. He insists that we tithe as a parish and that ten percent of our offertory goes to the world's poor. Through his leadership our parish has built schools and churches in the Third World, has supported projects here and abroad that help the poor and disadvantaged. Through his leadership (as well as the leadership of his predecessors) our parish gives close to a half a million dollars a year to the world's poor.

He is a true pastor who exercises his ministry with humility. He is a self-effacing servant of the Lord. He is Peter. He truly is *in persona Christi*. He has taught me how to be a leader of God's people. I am privileged to have ministered with him for over a quarter of a century.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Jesus Christ
Scripture and Revelation
Salvation/Soteriology
Church and Ecclesiology

Church Structure
Holy Orders
Creed
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well. Choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

JESUS CHRIST

Today's Gospel deals with the identity of the Son of Man. Peter asserts that Jesus is the messiah. Peter tells Jesus that he should not have to suffer. Jesus affirmed Peter for acknowledging him and told him that the Church would be built on him—the rock. However, he rebuked Peter for suggesting a path other than suffering. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about our Lord and Savior JESUS CHRIST.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus is the revelation of God. Today he is revealed as the Son of Man. His identity as God's Son, the long awaited Messiah is revealed. God continues to reveal himself to us through Divine Revelation, the Word of God. It is most fitting that our doctrinal session today will address SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Today's Gospel deals with the identity of the Son of Man. Peter asserts that Jesus is the messiah. Peter tells Jesus that he should not have to suffer. Jesus affirmed Peter for acknowledging him and told him that the Church would be built on him—the rock. However, he rebuked Peter for suggesting a path other than suffering. Jesus is the Son of Man who has come to save the world. Today's Gospel is a testament to that reality. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

CHURCH/ECCLESIOLOGY

Today Jesus tells Peter that the Church will be built upon him—Peter the rock—the leader of the Twelve Apostles. Today's liturgy highlights the origin of the Church that Jesus established when he appointed Peter to be its leader. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH and ECCLESIOLOGY.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Today Jesus tells Peter that the Church will be built upon him—Peter the rock—the first leader of the Twelve Apostles. Today's liturgy highlights the origin of the Church that Jesus established when he appointed Peter to be its leader. The structure of the Church flows from this first humble origin. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH and ECCLESIOLOGY.

HOLY ORDERS

Today Jesus tells Peter that the Church will be built upon him—Peter the rock, the first leader of the Twelve Apostles. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on the sacrament that continues the ordained priesthood established by Christ—HOLY ORDERS.

CREED

Today Jesus asserts his identity. Peter professes faith in Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah. Peter's profession of faith is the foundation of our Christian faith. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about our fundamental profession of faith that is professed at every Sunday Eucharistic liturgy—the NICENE CREED.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.